


Afghanistan **Freedom** Watch

November 21, 2005

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan



Soldiers with the 1st
Battalion, 508th
Parachute Infantry
Regiment, prepare to
fight

Page 8



Service members from various services and nations gathered at Camp Eggers on Nov. 11 in recognition of Veteran's Day. A ceremony was held to honor those who have fallen while in service.

Photo by Army Spc. Brianna Young-Navarro
117th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Page 3: Commentary: Young woman leads way into Afghanistan's future

Page 4: Afghan Army chief returns from U.S., brings back new ideas

Page 6: Engineers build culverts to curb flood waters at Salerno

Page 8: Infantrymen brush up on fundamental skills ►

Page 11: Troops improve stability in Kunar Province during Operation Pil

Page 12: Bagram Airmen spread cheer in Karezgay

Page 14: Around the services

Page 15: Board tests Soldiers skills
Photo page ►

Cover: Army Sgt. Matthew McNichol, squad leader, A Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, leads an assault element toward an objective during a dry run leading up to a squad live-fire exercise.

Photo by Army Sgt. Douglas DeMaio
20th Public Affairs Detachment



Afghanistan **Freedom** Watch

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CFC-A Commander - Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry
Public Affairs Officer - Col. James R. Yonts

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Freedom Watch Staff

Commander - Maj. T.G. Taylor
NCOIC - Staff Sgt. Matthew MacRoberts
Editor - Sgt. James-Denton Wyllie
Journalists - Staff Sgt. Ken Denny
Sgt. Douglas DeMaio, Spc. Jason Krawczyk
Spc. Tiffany Evans, Pfc. Vincent Fusco

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Young Afghan woman leads way into nation's democratic future

By Army Capt. Allan L. Dollison
Lashkar Gah Provincial Reconstruction Team

No one would argue that there are many differences between an average 18-year-old female high school graduate from Afghanistan and one from the United States.

One thing is certain, teenagers from both countries don't typically seek elected office to a governing body overseeing 1.4 million people. Unless you're Salima Sharifi, from Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province, that is.

The story of Salima and how she was elected to the Helmand Provincial Council may say more about how far Afghanistan has come in the last four years than any single other subject.

Salima is the daughter of Mohammad Zahir, who is a school teacher in Lashkar Gah. Salima was born in Helmand's Nahhri Sarraj District. Her family, like millions of other Afghans, fled the country during the decades of war with the Soviet Union and the Taliban. During most of that period, they temporarily resided in Iran and lived a very hard life as refugees. The family returned to Afghanistan in 2002 after the fall of the Taliban.

Her access to education in Iran was spotty at best. However, her father ensured that she and her siblings were educated.

A lot of her education came directly from her father. He dreamed of one day returning to his native country, and he was concerned that his children would fall behind in their academics due to their refugee status. Once they returned to Afghanistan, Salima was enrolled in the Lashkar Gah Girl's High School where she graduated in June.

Salima knew that the elections were a momentous event in Afghanistan's post-Taliban democratic development.

"My father is a major influence on me," she said. "I decided to run, but did so knowing that I had the comfort of my father's acceptance and backing."

Her choice of the Provincial Council instead of the Wolesi Jirga, shows a political shrewdness years beyond her age. She calculated that she would stand a better chance seeking the lesser of the two offices, which also had more seats available.

Her calculations paid off and she snuck in by garnering enough votes to snag the fourth and last seat that was designated for female candidates. She received over 2,000 votes, a tally that was many more than the majority of male candidates who sought the same office. This remarkable support from everyday Afghans shows her election was not a fluke, but rather an endorsement of her ideas.

Despite her growing up in Afghanistan and Iran, Salima has

ideas to solve Afghanistan's problems that are quite liberal in their approach.

She believes that Afghanistan is "becoming too dependent on Coalition forces for money and resources."

She said that money should come from wealthy Afghans who seem to be prevalent in southern Afghanistan's Helmand Province.

Salima also commented that many educated, successful and professional Afghans fled the country during the decades of wars. She believes that this has contributed to the current condition of the country. She hopes to urge them to come back and take leadership positions here in the country.

"People left (and are still leaving) because they are afraid," she said. She figures that if the phenomenal talent pool that is currently residing in other countries can be encouraged to return, then they will form the foundation for the true rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Her primary focus will be on young people. She said that Afghanistan is primarily a young country.

"There are far more younger people than older people" she said.

Salima only has to look at herself to realize what a young, educated person can do with a dream.

She feels that if she empowers thousands of similar young people, then they will form the foundation from which to rebuild Afghanistan.

Salima said she believes "education, and not money is the solution." And she feels strongly that education is the key to becoming truly independent.

"Expanding power and electricity, engineering roads, setting up a workable justice system, creating businesses and enterprises -- all of these things can be done by educated people," she said. "If we do it ourselves then we can solve our own problems, and not have to solely depend on Coalition forces."

Salima is on a mission. She doesn't intend to stop with this foray into politics. She has plans to study at a university, and dreams of becoming a lawyer.

Given what she has accomplished so far in her young life, coupled with the challenges and adversities that she has had to overcome, no one doubts that Salima will achieve her goals.

Recently, the Lashkar Gah Provisional Reconstruction Team nominated Salima for a position on an upcoming International Visitor Program, sponsored by the United States Department of State. If selected, Salima will fly to the United States and take part in briefings to learn about business, governance and justice

See future, page 5



Photo by Army Capt. Allan L. Dollison

Representative Salima Sharif

Afghan Army chief returns from U.S., brings back new ideas

By Army Sgt. Mason T. Lowery
Office of Security Cooperation-
Afghanistan Public Affairs

KABUL, Afghanistan - The chief of the Afghan National Army's General Staff recently returned from a tour of the United States where he visited three U.S. Army posts to learn training techniques and experience American culture.

Gen. Bismullah Khan returned to Afghanistan on Oct. 22 certain of the United States' commitment to Afghanistan. He said he was impressed with the professionalism of U.S. Army training, particularly the role of the non-commissioned officer, and returned with new ideas about how to train a professional army and a greater appreciation for the American way of life.

"It was an extremely educational visit. We learned a lot about U.S. military facilities and methods of training," he said.

Khan brought three key members of his staff with him on the trip, Maj. Gen.

Abdul "Habibi" Abdullah, chief of personnel; Brig. Gen. Aminullah Karim, operations deputy director in training and education; and Lt. Col. Mohammad Farid, training and operations director.

"We highlighted to ANA senior leadership time-tested and proven methods of training Soldiers, empowering NCOs and developing leaders," said Army Lt. Col. John T. Hansen, Office of Security Cooperation-Afghanistan's Air Division chief and Khan's escort during the trip. He added that the impact of the trip on the ANA is qualitative rather than quantitative. "It's more of a mindset, thoughts and ideas, which are the start of any meaningful process."

The Afghan delegation began their visit at Fort Drum, N.Y. While there, they observed training and established relationships with leaders and staff members of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, which is scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom early next year.

Khan addressed the leaders and Soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division, explaining the operational environment of the conflict and how the Coalition effort is helping Afghanistan. "Islam is not a culture of terror," he stated. "Afghans now have no fear of external threats, thanks to the United States and Coalition."

From Fort Drum, the delegation traveled south to Fort Benning, Ga. While at the "Home of the Infantry," Khan observed Soldiers training at Ranger School and Basic Combat Training as well as those conducting training at the NCO Academy and Officer Candidate School.

"The most significant thing we showed them was the impact of an empowered noncommissioned officer corps. The Soviet system, by which previous Afghan military formations were modeled, marginalized NCOs, said Hansen.

"We demonstrated the powerful impact of NCOs bestowed with authority, responsibility, and autonomy by

See chief, next page

Dari/Pashtu phrase of the week

Dari/Pashtu phrase of the week:
It's nice to meet you.

Dari

Az deedan-e-shuma khoosh hal shudam
(OZ dee-dawn-a-shoo-mash hoosh haul
shoo-dahm)

Pashtu

Da tasoo leedena sokha khoosh hal
shooma

(Dah tah-soo lee-deh-nah sow-ha hoosh
haul shoo-mah)

Afghan cultural tidbit

On average, Afghans in the United States place a higher value on education than many other refugee groups. In Islam, education is valued more than wealth. Most children of Afghan refugees and Afghan immigrants are college-educated or enrolled in a university.

From chief, previous page

visiting the Primary Leadership Development Course and other NCO-owned and operated organizations and events," Hansen said. "We hope to help them empower their own NCO Corps (in Afghanistan)."

The delegation viewed hands-on training at Fort Benning and observed U.S. Soldiers conducting military operations in urban terrain training. They saw NCOs leading the training, based on guidance they received from officers.

At the Officer Candidate School, Karim asked Army Brig. Gen. James Yarbrough, deputy commanding general of Fort Benning, why college graduates join the Army. Yarbrough told him, "They just have a desire to serve their country."

The final leg of Khan's American journey took him to Fort McPherson, near Atlanta, to meet with senior leaders from the U.S. Army Forces Command and U.S. Army Forces Central Command. There they discussed future security cooperation

objectives for Afghanistan.

In addition to gaining invaluable insight about how the U.S. Army conducts its training, Khan and his staff also experienced a bit of American culture during their stay. Several short excursions to local neighborhoods and businesses familiarized the Afghan staff officers with the characteristics of American society.

When Khan and the delegation returned to Afghanistan, they were able to reflect on what they learned. "It was a perfect combination of visiting military installations, visiting with Americans and seeing different cultural sites," Khan said.

Hansen said the U.S. Army benefited from the trip as well. "The visit demonstrated to U.S. operational commanders, training base leaders and our Soldiers the commitment of Afghanistan to developing a national army with competent leadership." He noted that the trip also had a positive impact on basic trainees. Seeing the Afghan leaders brought home the reason for their training, he said.

"The delegation gained valuable insight from the trip. They are looking forward to implementing many new ideas and techniques as they improve their own training base in Afghanistan," Hansen said.

From future, page 3

programs that could potentially be implemented in Afghanistan. The program has limited openings available, but Salima is hopeful that she can see the United States and learn more to help the citizens who elected her. The program will also focus on educating Afghanistan's newly elected future leaders, about the basics of the political and governance process.

Coalition forces have provided the opportunity for individuals to exercise their democratic rights, as well as foster the types of ideas that Salima has.

This is no small achievement and it shows that Afghanistan is well on its way in developing a democracy.

Enduring Voices

What do you plan on doing for the holidays?



Army Capt. James McKnight, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force

"I plan on spending the day with my section and pulling guard duty so my soldiers can have a little time off. I also plan on getting very little sleep so I can call my family in the morning."



Army Col. Michael Healey, 144th Mobile Liaison Team

"I plan on e-mailing my family and writing my sweet wife, and spending it with my troops. And during the week of Christmas, we will be going to an orphanage."



Air Force Senior Airman Jesus Cortez, 1st Expeditionary RED HORSE Group

"I plan on calling the family as much as I can, sleeping in, and writing holiday cards, and I also plan on packing to go home."



Army Spc. Parres Gardner, 510th Personnel Services Battalion

"I will be spending time with friends for Christmas, so I plan on being a secret Santa. For New Years, I plan on throwing a party. I also am going to try to call home as much as possible to keep up morale."



Army Staff Sgt. Wayne Pritchard, a construction team leader with the 1224th Engineer Detachment, watches Army Spcs. Norbert Iriarte, a carpentry mason with the 1224th, and Frank Warner, a plumber also in the 1224th, on Oct. 13. Iriarte and Warner are standing in the spot where a culvert will be built in a drainage ditch that is being dug along Washington Road on Forward Operating Base Salerno, Afghanistan.

Engineers build culverts to curb floods at forward operating base

By Army Spc.

Laura E. Griffin

Task Force Devil Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE SALERNO,

Afghanistan - When thunderclouds roll in and rain falls on the sun-baked earth that Forward Operating Base Salerno is built on, the water pouring from the sky does not soak in.

Instead, the roads and low-lying areas around the FOB become rivers and lakes because the water has nowhere to go.

This is why engineers from 1224th Engineering Detachment, a National Guard unit from Guam, and the FOB Salerno Facility Engineering Team have been focusing their attention on building a drainage ditch and culverts along Washington Road on the FOB.

Army Staff Sgt. Wayne Pritchard, a construction section leader with the 1224th, recognizes the important function this ditch will serve.

"This ditch is going to allow for better drainage and prevent erosion in our roads," said Pritchard.

Washington Road runs north to south through the FOB, bisecting the helicopter landing zone and the hospital.

David Guzik, the civilian FET manager, is helping to lay out the plans for a more comprehensive drainage system for the FOB.

"The Washington Road ditch is just one of many improvements to the drainage system on the FOB," said Guzik.

"We're eventually going to have other ditches and drainage routes that will allow water to drain into the wadis (gullies) that surround the FOB."

The FOB is situated between two large hills where rain runoff naturally flows downhill toward the east. This makes the FOB prone to flooding problems, which are exacerbated by building compacted roads and laying gravel around buildings.

"The FOB sits on a slight slope of about one percent from the west down to the east," said Guzik. "Proper

drainage systems were not put in place when the FOB was first built, as is typical of military installations in a war zone. There are just other things to worry about first, like the security of the area and building housing for the troops."

Much of the flooding takes place from the hospital to the brigade tactical operations center. Water runs off the HLZ into the current ditch faster than the ditch can redirect it to the north wadi, causing the ditch to overflow.

"The work on the ditch made it wider and deeper, and

gave it a gradual slope, allowing the water to flow to a wadi," said Guzik. "It just needs a few finishing touches and it will be done. The time it takes to complete the comprehensive plan depends on what other construction projects come up that will take priority over the drainage system, like winterization of all the FOBs in the area."

As Afghanistan enters the rainy season, which lasts from October to April, the troops of FOB Salerno can look forward to having drier boots and thanks to the drainage system being installed.



Army Spc. Therese Mesa, a carpentry mason with the 1224th Engineer Detachment, steers an earth compactor through the ditch where a culvert was installed Oct. 13.

Photo by Army Spc. Laura E. Griffin

Army Sgt. Matthew McNichol, an infantryman with 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, sends a status report to his squad leader.



Back to basics

Infantrymen prepare for enemy fire, brush up on core battle fundamentals

By Army Sgt. Douglas DeMaio
20th Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ANED, Afghanistan - Infantrymen from A Company, 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment polished up on fundamentals used during enemy contact with the preparation and execution of squad-level live fire and stress firing exercises Nov. 6 and 7.

Although the squads in the unit have had several encounters with the enemy during their deployment, the training was designed to keep the men focused and prepared for any enemy actions they could soon encounter.

"The purpose of the training was to refresh on basic battle skills," said Army Sgt. Matthew McNichol, squad leader for A Co., 1st Bn., 508th PIR. "We've been here for nine months now, and we do training like zeroing our weapon and things like that. But we haven't done this in quite some time."

The live-fire exercise consisted of squad members on the ground and in vehicles moving toward the simulated enemy while in contact, he said. The two Humvees assaulting the objective in the exercise had either a .50-caliber machine gun or a M-240B machine gun.

The squad had to move toward the target -- more than 700 meters away -- using effective communication, rates of fire, and maneuvering using what cover and concealment was nearby.

"This type of exercise, or an ambush, is primarily what happens if we get attacked or come into contact, so it makes for perfect training," McNichol said.

The training not only gave the infantrymen a visual of what they may engage on



Photo by Army Sgt. Douglas DeMaio

An infantryman with 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, pulls security during a squad live-fire exercise at Forward Operating Base Aned.

the battlefield, but with live rounds and intentional physical exertion being placed on the troops, it provided a realistic scenario for the Soldiers, he said.

"It helps with muscle memory because when we are out there and the bullets are flying, it becomes a lot easier to regain

focus," McNichol said. "(The training) comes right back to mind."

Army Spc. Philip Harrill, a gunner with A Co., 1st Bn., 508th PIR, said the secondary effect of the training is reaffirming the trust and confidence the troops

See Contact, page 10

From Contact, page 9

have in one another.

"You've trained with your men, people in your squad and in your platoon," Harrill said. "You know that they know their job and you know yours, and you're confident in everybody's skills that you are going into battle with.

"If something does happen, you know

you're ready for it," Harrill said.

That confidence from training transcends to the battlefield, McNichol said, providing Soldiers with a winning attitude and the poise to defeat anyone on the battlefield.

"They've got the initial element of surprise, but we have all these heavy weapons and our main priority is to get

fire superiority," he said. "If we have that, then they should be afraid because that then allows us to move forward and sweep across the enemy - like we trained for here today."

The squad believes they have superior tactics and firepower over the enemy, McNichol said.

"With that, we are undefeated," he said.



Army Sgt. Matthew McNichol, a squad leader with the 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, takes cover during a dry run leading up to a squad live-fire exercise.



Photos by Marine Sgt. Robert M. Storm

(From left) Marine infantrymen Cpl. Brian R. Ash, Sgts. Curtis D. Magee and Michael A. Placencia, discuss how to best position their squads for effective protection during the night .

Operation Pil: Marines, Sailors help stabilize Watapor valley in Kunar

By Marine Sgt. Robert M. Storm
2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment
Public Affairs

JALALABAD, Afghanistan - Marines and Sailors of 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Corps Division, Marine Corps Base, Hawaii, conducted Operation Pil in the Watapor Valley of Kunar Province Oct. 16 through 23 to improve security and assist in stabilizing the government in the region.

While the country remains dangerous and uncertain, steps toward a peaceful and stable government have been considerable.

Operation Pil was the latest mission launched by the Marines and Sailors aimed at improving security within the problem areas of Kunar Province.

Marine Sgt. Curtis D. Magee, machine gunner, from Collins, Miss., said they didn't find much during this operation, but it was still good to show the villagers a Coalition presence.

"For our part of the mission, we had to hike up over 5,000 feet to a mountain top, but it was good for us to do that stuff. It's what we need to do as infantry, staying out in the field and accomplishing whatever mission, we're assigned," he said.

The Marines encountered little enemy contact throughout the operation with the exception of Camp Blessing, the farthest Marine Corps outpost in Afghanistan. Blessing received indirect mortar fire from enemy forces, but the Marines countered using artillery and air strikes and received no more enemy fire.

In support of the operation, Marines and Sailors deployed to accomplish various missions throughout Kunar Province.

"As the main effort, we were tasked with ascending a mountain in order to cordon and search the village of Tsangar. This village was an (enemy) safe haven for planning attacks against Coalition forces," said 1st Lt. Chuck Siedlecki Jr., executive officer G Company, from Berlin, N.J. "The Marines and Sailors did a stellar job accomplishing the mission."



Marines sleep before heading out to conduct Operation Pil. The 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, conducted Operation Pil in the Watapor Valley Oct. 16 through 23 to improve security and assist in stabilizing the government in the troubled region.

An Afghan boy gives a "thumbs up" following the distribution of supplies as part of an Adopt-A-Village visit at Karezgay, Afghanistan, on Nov. 3.



Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus McDonald

Bagram Airmen spread cheer, share blankets, smiles in Karezgay village

By Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus McDonald
455th Air Expeditionary Wing
Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Airmen participating in the ongoing Global War on Terrorism here took time to spread some cheer and share smiles with the people of Karezgay, Afghanistan, as part of an Adopt-A-Village visit Nov. 3.

The Airmen distributed more than 1,200 pounds of winter clothes, blankets, school supplies and toys in the village, according to Air Force Master Sgt. Edgar Langdon, Bagram's Adopt-A-Village coordinator.

"Our Adopt-A-Village program gives Airmen from the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing a chance to travel outside the gate and share some good will with the people of Afghanistan," said Langdon, a native of Hatboro, Penn.

"During this visit, we focused on efforts on items that'll hopefully come to good use as the temperature drops in coming months," he said.

Chief Master Sgt. Debra Ballentine, 455th Expeditionary Mission Support Group superintendent, described the visit as awesome.

"This experience gave us a chance to show the local community just how much we care," said Ballentine. "We're here in Afghanistan to encourage a spirit of cooperation. Adopt-A-Village visits are one of many ways in which we can do this."

Ballentine, a native of Lacey, Wash., said the village children were delightful.

"Many of them enjoyed getting their picture taken, especially when they were able to immediately see their picture after it was taken," the chief said. "They were excited about getting school supplies and several even tried to learn a few words of English."

Putting this project together took a lot of work on the part of several agencies, including people in the United States who sent clothes, school supplies, toys and food, Ballentine said.

"We appreciate their generosity and compassion for the people of Afghanistan," she said. "Their efforts are truly making a difference."

Master Sgt. Donnie Wright, special-purpose vehicle and equipment craftsman, 455th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron, said this trip will allow him to better explain to his family and friends some of the reasons he's deployed to Afghanistan.

"People seem to understand a little better from someone who has a first-hand experience with what is going on outside the base," said Wright, a native of Empire, Ala.

Staff Sgt. Matt Greene, biomedical equipment repair technician, 455th Expeditionary Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, said the visit gave him a chance to get

off the installation and see the "real" Afghanistan.

"It was a chance to see for myself some of the wonderful things we are doing for the people here," said Greene.

"Seeing everyone's excitement and the smiles on the children's faces was definitely the highlight for me," said the sergeant, a native of Knoxville, Tenn. "Hopefully programs like this can continue so more Afghan children will get to see the kindness in the hearts of the American people."

Airman 1st Class Eric Nelson, aerospace ground equipment apprentice, 455th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron, and Airman 1st Class Raul Tellez, EC-130H

crew chief, 41st Expeditionary Electronic Combat Squadron, both said the visit was an unforgettable experience.

"This trip gave me a chance to see how the locals live while at the same time giving them things they could use to make their lives better," said Nelson, a native of Taunton, Mass. "I really enjoyed seeing how little (possession wise) the villagers had and yet how happy they still were."

"I really loved seeing the small children's faces after they received the things we had for them," said Tellez, a native of Chowchilla, Calif. "Once the trip's over, you're really proud of what you've done and of the country you serve."



Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Debra Ballentine, 455th Expeditionary Mission Support Group superintendent, helps distribute school supplies during an Adopt-A-Village visit at Karezgay, Afghanistan, on Nov. 3.

Photo by Air Force Staff Sgt. Marcus McDonald

Veterans are heroes among us

By Carolyn Lyon

Air Force Security Forces Center

LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas - This Veterans' Day, Nov. 11, many service members took time to reflect on the true meaning of what the day represents -- a day to honor all those men and women who served our country honorably in the armed services, in wartime and peace.

Our nation remembers the members of a great generation -- those who have fought in the Gulf War, and operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom -- and those who have come to the aid of their fellow Americans in recent months and aided them in the hurricane relief efforts along America's Gulf Coast.

Let us not forget our Vietnam veterans and heroes who walk among us, work beside us, and carry with them the tortured memories of a time when they, many in their youth, responded to their nation's call -- leaving families behind, putting themselves in harm's way and sacrificing their lives in a conflict, a war, being fought to combat the spread of communism -- a different time in history where groups of Americans were dodging the draft, burning draft cards, and fleeing their own homeland to keep from serving their country -- all while their fellow countrymen continued their missions thousands of miles from home.

No flag waving or yellow ribbons, posters, or parades -- no cheers or "welcome homes" upon their return, as the count rose to more than 58,000 American men and women who gave their lives; these veterans can be proud of their motto, "Our Cause Was Just." Not one returning Soldier or Airman should have had to endure the feelings of emptiness and isolation that prevailed. Many veterans and heroes of the conflicts in Southeast and Southwest Asia and the Gulf War are here among us, quietly and dutifully continuing their service to their country. Recognize and acknowledge them for the dedicated veterans they are and the contributions they have made and continue to make.

To the 2,000 American men and women who have lost their lives in Southwest Asia in the name of Iraqi Freedom, many of them our future generation's hope and promise, we owe our thanks and debt of gratitude for their service -- their honor, courage and sacrifice. As we continue to deploy our troops and return them to their families and loved ones, some arriving in flag-draped caskets, know that among them are today's veterans. Be proud as a nation, show your support of our troops, and express your gratitude and appreciation to these vigilant warriors. Shake a veteran's hand or pat him or her on the back. They deserve it.

To the veterans who have touched my

life -- my loving husband of 37 years, Jim, a Vietnam veteran, whose proudly served his country for 32 years in the United States Air Force -- thank you for the many sacrifices you endured for our daughters and me and for your expression of loyalty and patriotism for your country and fellow man, by continuing to serve our federal government as an employee here.

To Tex, his best friend, who introduced us in 1967, preceded him to Vietnam by just two months, and lost his life there 10 months later -- and who found one another in that distant land, to bid a final goodbye -- one unknowingly. He lies at rest at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery here in San Antonio.

To Shawn, our U.S. Navy veteran son-in-law, of whom we are so proud.

To my dad, a World War II Navy veteran who served in Pearl Harbor and departed this earth over three decades ago.

To my godfather and three uncles, U.S. Marine Corps and Army World War II veterans -- two still among us.

To 20-year old Lance Cpl. Rhonald "Dain" Rairdan -- who, early this year, gave the ultimate sacrifice in Iraq just days before he was to return home to San Antonio. His proud father, Dave, an Air Force Veteran, continues his dedicated federal service here.

Veterans -- We Thank You, Remember You and Honor You.

Bush praises troops supporting earthquake relief

By Jon Gagne

Naval Education and Training Command Public Affairs

WASHINGTON - Service members supporting earthquake-relief efforts in South Asia "represent the best of America (and) the generous spirit of our country," President George Bush said Nov. 9 at the White House.

"I'm grateful to the men and women in uniform for the noble work they are doing," Bush said as he described sweeping U.S. government support one month after a devastating earthquake struck Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. Its epicenter was near Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, northeast of Islamabad.

The Oct. 8 earthquake killed more than 70,000 Pakistanis and injured more than 70,000 others while leaving nearly 3 million

homeless. In India, it killed more than 1,000 people and injured more than 6,000 others.

Bush described the magnitude 7.6 earthquake as the worst natural disaster to strike the region in a century and vowed that the United States will continue to provide help, particularly as winter approaches and many people are homeless.

In addition to a pledge of \$156 million for relief and reconstruction needs, the United States has provided food, water, blankets, tents and medical care, he said. Disaster-response personnel also remain on the ground to assess needs and offer assistance, the president said.

"Our government's response to this tragedy ... should say to the people of the world, 'We care when somebody else suffers,'" he said.



Photos by Army Sgt. Douglas DeMaio

Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, look away as a round leaves a mortar tube during a Soldier of the Month competition at Forward Operating Base Aned Nov. 6.

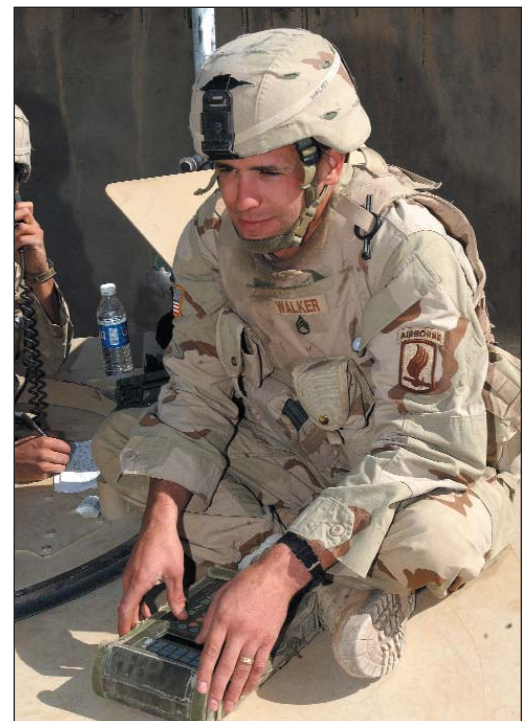
Board tests Soldiers' skills

By Army Sgt. Douglas DeMaio
20th Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE ANED, Afghanistan - Infantrymen from 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment were tested on Nov. 6 during a Soldier of the Month board on their ability to call for the shifting of mortar fire from a known point.

The Soldier of the Month contestants were located on a range a few kilometers off the base, while a mortar section from the unit, located back on base, received fire missions from the competitors who were being rated on their ability to perform the mission-essential task.

"It's hands-on-training for these guys," said Army Sgt. Michael Fogleman, a squad leader with A Company, 1-508th PIR.



Mortar section sergeant, Army Staff Sgt. Adam Walker, plots the solutions for a firing mission.



Freedom Watch
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"The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight, nothing which is more important than his own personal safety, is a miserable creature, and has no chance of being free unless made or kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

**John Stuart Mill
(Philosopher)**